

## At the Airport

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The plane is landing at the San Francisco airport. Mrs. Lau is looking out the window. It's a cold gray day in December.

"Can you see anything, mother?" Ming asks his mother. He's speaking Chinese.

"I see planes," Mrs. Lau says. She's very tired. It's a long flight from Hong Kong to America. Her feet hurt. They look swollen, and her shoes are too tight. Mrs. Lau feels very old.

"We'll be getting off soon," Ming says. "Then we go through customs. It won't be long now." He thinks about his wife, Sue. "Sue will be waiting for us," he says. "She's bringing the children."

Mrs. Lau smiles. She wants to see her grandchildren. Lisa is eight years old, and Johnny is six. Mrs. Lau wonders how tall they are. Children grow so quickly!

Ming takes his mother's bags. Soon they're walking into the airport building. They stand in line. "Just like Hong Kong," Mrs. Lau thinks. "There's always a line."

A man at the counter takes Ming's passport and green card. Then he looks at Mrs. Lau's passport. He says something to her, but Mrs. Lau can't understand. The man turns and speaks to Ming. "She has a tourist visa," he says. "What's she going to do?"

"My father died in Hong Kong," Ming says. "My mother is coming to stay with us. I have to see the Immigration and Naturalization Service. We want her to stay longer."

"Okay," the man says. "As a tourist she can stay for only six months. That's all the time her tourist visa allows." He stamps the passport.

They go and wait a long time for their suitcases. Mrs. Lau's feet are very uncomfortable. She rests against the wall.

Ming gets their bags; then they go to customs. The customs officer looks in one of Mrs. Lau's suitcases. He finds some small plants.

"What are these?" the customs officer asks Mrs. Lau.

Mrs. Lau doesn't understand, so Ming answers for her.

"They're Chinese herbs," he says. "My mother uses them to make tea."

"I'll have to take the herbs away," the customs officer says.

"Why?" Ming asks. "Can we get them back?"

"I'm sorry, sir," the officer says. He takes the plants and puts them in a plastic bag. "If we don't know a plant, we destroy it. We have to be very careful. Many diseases enter the United States from other countries."

He puts the plastic bag into the trash basket.

Mrs. Lau is furious. "You can't take away my herbs!" she says in Chinese. "Ming, make him give me back my medicine. I won't be well without it. Ming, you're a dentist. You know about my medicine. Tell him I need my herbs!"

Ming tries to calm her. "I can't get the herbs back, mother," he says. "But I can get you some new ones. I'll take you to an herb shop in San Francisco. There are a lot of them in Chinatown."

Mrs. Lau is almost crying. Ming leads her away quickly. He's worried. This is not a good start to his mother's life in America.

